

# Languages of Difference in the Portuguese Empire. The Spread of “Caste” in the Indian World\*

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Lenguajes de diferencia en el Imperio portugués.  
La difusión de “casta” en la India

*Linguagens de diferença no Império português.  
A difusão de “casta” na Índia*

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[90]

**Abstract**

This essay discusses the circulation of the language of caste in the Indian world in the context of the Portuguese Empire. *Caste* is an inevitable word in the moment of considering the Indian social system as well as when comparing it with European/Western societies. Since it was a word initially brought by the Portuguese to the Indian world, it is relevant to ask whether the Portuguese played an important role in its transformation into such a relevant social category. Six of the most important sixteenth-century narratives about the Portuguese presence in India as well as treatises, letters, legal documents, vocabularies and dictionaries of the early-modern period will be under scrutiny in order to identify the variations of the word “casta”, its circulation in Estado da Índia, and beyond it. The analysis of these sources will also permit an understanding of how Portuguese colonial experience shaped the future meanings of “casta”, and therefore, the ways “casta” shaped Indian society (and not only).

**Keywords:** (Author) power, Portuguese Empire; (Thesaurus) caste, language development, India, colonialism.

## RESUMEN

Este ensayo discute la circulación del lenguaje de casta en la India en el contexto del Imperio portugués. Casta es una palabra inevitable a la hora de considerar el sistema social indio, así como para compararlo con sociedades europeas/occidentales. Al ser un vocablo llevado en inicio por los portugueses al mundo indio, es importante preguntarse si estos jugaron un papel importante en su transformación como categoría social de gran importancia. Seis de las narrativas más importantes del siglo XVI sobre la presencia portuguesa en la India, así como tratados, cartas, documentos legales, vocabularios y diccionarios de la temprana Edad Moderna, se estudian aquí para identificar las variaciones de la palabra casta y su circulación en el Estado de la India y más allá. El análisis de estas fuentes también permitirá entender cómo la experiencia colonial de Portugal le dio forma a los futuros significados de la palabra, y así, cómo “casta” le dio forma no solo a la sociedad de la India, sino también a otras.

[91]

**Palabras clave:** (Autor) poder, Imperio portugués; (Theasaurus) casta, evolución del lenguaje, India, Colonialismo.

## RESUMO

Este ensaio discute a circulação da linguagem de casta na Índia no contexto do Império português. *Casta* é uma palavra inevitável na hora de considerar o sistema social indiano bem como para compará-lo com sociedades europeias/ocidentais. Ao ser um vocábulo levado inicialmente pelos portugueses ao mundo indiano, é importante perguntar-se se estes desempenharam um papel importante em sua transformação como categoria social de grande importância. Seis das narrativas mais importantes do século XVI sobre a presença portuguesa na Índia, como tratados, cartas, documentos legais, vocabulários e dicionários do início da Idade Moderna, estudam-se aqui para identificar as variações da palavra *casta* e sua circulação no Estado da Índia e mais além dela. A análise dessas fontes também permitirá entender como a experiência colonial portuguesa deu forma aos futuros significados da palavra e, assim, como “casta” deu forma não somente à sociedade da Índia, mas também a outras.

**Palavras-chave:** (Autor) poder, Império português; (Thesaurus) casta, evolução da linguagem, Índia, Colonialismo.

## Introduction

[92]

This essay presents the first results of wider research on the connections between the construction and circulation of the language of caste as a social category in early-modern India and Mexico and the role played by Iberians in this process. In the next pages, I will provide an introduction of the Indian case, followed by an analysis of the uses of the word “casta” in the context of the Portuguese Empire. Even if the wider horizon is a comparison between the Spanish and the Portuguese empires as well as of the Atlantic and the Indian worlds, this exercise is explicitly modest, limited and introductory.

Subject of multiple meanings, caste can be defined today as “an ethnic group within a larger society, one which tended to marry endogamously and be ranked relative to others”.<sup>1</sup> Endogamy worked as a system of inclusion and exclusion, and caste belonging was kept by a series of ritual practices, many of them related with religion and occupation.<sup>2</sup> Albeit present in many and different societies across the world, India has been considered the place where caste knew its more sophisticated expression. Indeed, as Sumit Guha puts it, caste-system is still “the master key to understanding India”, even if, as Guha argues, Indian society is “like any other complex civilization, multi-stranded or polyadic”.<sup>3</sup>

One of the popular assumptions about Indian caste-system is the intertemporality, immobility and rigidity of its castes, and its intrinsic relationship with Hinduism. Apparently extensive to all India, the *Laws of Manu*, a “Hindu” treatise produced between the first century BCE and the second century CE, provided a synthesis of this system. In 1794, William Jones translated into English the accepted original version; a version commonly

1. Sumit Guha, *Beyond Caste. Identity and Power in South Asia, Past and Present* (Leiden: Brill, 2013); since it is impossible to refer here all the bibliography about the Indian caste-system, in this essay I provide only an operational selection of it.
2. Surinder Jodhka, *Caste* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012); Christopher Jaffrelot, “Caste”, *Oxford Bibliographies Online*. 2011. Web. Available at: <http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780195399318/obo-9780195399318-0095.xml>.
3. Guha 1 (and chapter one). For other cases, see, for example: George Kubler, *The Indian Caste of Peru, 1795-1940: A Population Study Based upon Tax Records and Census Reports* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1973); Christopher H. Lutz, *Santiago de Guatemala, 1541-1773: City, Caste, and the Colonial Experience* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997); Source Wikipedia, *Latin American Caste System: Black People, Mestizo, Indigenous Peoples of the Americas, Casta, Mulatto, Cholo, Criollo People, Zambo, Castizo* (Memphis: Books LLC, 2010).

used by Orientalists in search for the structure of Indian society.<sup>4</sup> *Laws of Manu* exposed the theory of the four varnas (which, in Sanskrit, means color),<sup>5</sup> which stated that Indian society was divided into four main social groups (Brahmans, Kshatryas, Vaysias and Sudras), hierarchized in function of their ethnic origins, their endogamic practices, and their grades of purity.

The in-depth belief in the long-term and extensive nature of the Indian caste-system helps to explain why European social theory considered the Indian society as the “main other” of the European/Western one. Scholars, among whom we can find Orientalists and some founding fathers of sociological knowledge (like Marx, Weber, or Durkheim) considered that while social mobility (and equality and class) characterized the modern Western social systems, India was, instead, encapsulated in a social system based on immutable inequality.<sup>6</sup> The *Homo Hierarchicus* of Louis Dumont is iconic of this kind of social theory in which caste was a powerful metaphor for inequality, with a strong impact until recently in the scholarship about Indian society, as well as in the ways the majority of Indians perceived themselves.<sup>7</sup>

Alternative to this tradition, another line of scholarship questioned many of the *topoi* on the fixity and extensiveness of caste in Indian society, downplaying too, the role of religion in it. Inspired by the work of M. N. Srinivas (published in the same year of Louis Dumont’s *Homo Hierarchicus*),<sup>8</sup>

[93]

4. Patrick Olivelle, ed. *The Law Code of Manu* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Brian K. Smith, *Classifying the Universe: The Ancient Indian Varna System and the Origins of Caste* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).
5. “Varna-Hinduism”, *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Web. Available at: <http://www.britannica.com/topic/varna-Hinduism>.
6. Ronald Inden, *Imagining India* (London: Basil Blackwell, 1990). For a critique to Inden’s thesis, see Murray Milner, *Status and Sacredness. A General Theory of Status and an Analysis of Indian Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); see also Gupta Dipankar, ed. *Social Stratification* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992); and Ursula Sharma, *Caste. Concepts in Social Sciences* (New Delhi: Viva, 2002).
7. Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus: Essai sur le système de castes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966); Louis Dumont, *Homo aequalis: genèse et épanouissement de l’idéologie économique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1977); G. R. Madan, *Western Sociologists in Indian Society: Marx, Spencer, Weber, Durkheim and Pareto* [1979] (London: Routledge, 2010). A good critique of this literature can be found in Manuel de Magalhães, “Pequenos Reis e Grandes Honras. Culto, Poder e Estatuto na Índia Ocidental”, PhD dissertation (Lisbon: Instituto Universitário de Lisboa, 2012) Introduction.
8. M. N. Srinivas, *Social Change in Modern India* (Bombay: Allied Publishers, 1966).

[94]

this literature has demonstrated that the struggles for upward mobility and status elevation were characteristic of early-modern and modern India, showing, as well, that the experience and the practices of caste were significantly different from their classical forms of textualization.<sup>9</sup> This literature has also stressed the role played by European colonialism in the perception and production of Indian dynamics of caste, in its rigidification (helped by British censuses of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, for example),<sup>10</sup> as well as in its dissemination throughout all India.<sup>11</sup>

The findings of this literature inspire this essay, which intends to revisit the role played by the Portuguese (Iberian) imperial presence in India in the dissemination of the word caste as the most important social category in the Indian subcontinent, a category that has a longstanding impact beyond India, too. As Lakoff and Johnson have suggested, changes in conceptual systems affect the ways people perceive the world, and therefore, the way they act in the world.<sup>12</sup> The word caste became not only another word in

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9. Declan Quigley, *The Interpretation of Caste* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993).
  10. Even in the textual results of these censuses, there was a recognition of the instability of the word “caste” to identify the diversity of Indian society. See R. V. Russell, *The Tribes and Castes of the Central Provinces of India*, vol. 1 (London: Macmillan and Co. Limited, 1916); N. Gerald Barrier, ed. *The Census in British India* (New Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1981).
  11. Srinivas 2, in Vegard Iversen, “Caste and Upward Mobility”, *The Oxford Handbook of the Indian Economy*, ed. Chetan Gbate (Oxford: Oxford Handbooks Online, 2012). Web. Available at: <http://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199734580.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199734580-e-7?rskey=SfzDNf&result=2>. Besides Guha, see also Bernard. S. Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge, The British in India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Christopher H. Bayly, *Empire and Information Intelligence Gathering and Social Knowledge in India, 1780-1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Susan Bayly, *Caste, Society and Politics in India from the Eighteenth Century to the Modern Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Nicholas B. Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Ishita Banerjee-Dube, ed. *Caste in History* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2008); David Mosse, *The Saint in the Banyan Tree: Christianity and Caste Society in India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).
  12. G. Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980). Labeling can have deep social effects, defining the positions of people in the social, legal and political systems, as well as their horizons of action

the shared social vocabulary, but also what Koselleck would call a “basic concept”, a word that became inevitable. Without it, it is “no longer possible to recognize and interpret social and political reality.”<sup>13</sup> Indeed, the word “casta” helped to shape the “ways people perceived the world”, as well as “the way they acted in it”.

Among other authors, Susan Bayly’s *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, Frank Conlon’s *Caste in a Changing World*, and Francisco Bethencourt’s *Racisms* have addressed this early-modern Portuguese presence. However, it is with Sumit Guha that the discussion went further.<sup>14</sup> In his book *Beyond Caste*, Guha argued that the “Iberian idea of bounded, normatively endogamous groups based on biological (or ‘blood’) descent” was “added to the chaotic mix of social categories in southern Asia in the 16<sup>th</sup> century”, contributing to normalize the chaos around one and only variable, purity of blood, that is to say, caste.<sup>15</sup> However, purity of blood, Guha says, was only but one among many forms of social classification that existed in India prior to the Portuguese arrival. It was because of the Portuguese/European domination that “caste” (and purity of blood) had become hegemonic (I am schematizing, of course, a sophisticated argument).

Even if I agree, in general, with this interpretation, I am convinced that Guha overplays the role of the Portuguese in the “ordering” of the Indian “chaotic mix”, even if he considers that the Portuguese “were evolving a

[95]

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(Lakoff and Johnson, chapter one). Those who had the power of labeling people could define their fixity in a certain position, their mobility, their futures. Re-labeling (and the use of the word “casta” in India is an expression of it) could even provoke, as António Manuel Hespanha has suggested, “a kind of social revolution”. See António Manuel Hespanha, *Imbecillitas. As bem-aventuranças da inferioridade nas sociedades do Antigo Regime* (São Paulo: Annablume, 2010).

13. Jan-Werner Müller, “On Conceptual History”, *Rethinking Modern European Intellectual History*, eds. Darrin M. McMahon and Samuel Moyn (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014) 84.
14. Susan Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings, Muslims and Christians in South Indian Society, 1700-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Frank Conlon, *Caste in a Changing World: The Chitrapur Saraswat Brahmins, 1700-1935* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California, 1977); Francisco Bethencourt, *Racisms. From the Crusades to the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013). See also Ângela Barreto Xavier and Ines G. Županov, *Catholic Orientalism. Portuguese Empire, Indian Knowledge, 16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2015).
15. Guha 24-25.

[96]

system of ethnic and social stratification by biological ancestry” when they arrived in India. I wonder whether what the Portuguese experienced in India helped them to define their own template of constructing difference at home and abroad, too.<sup>16</sup> In fact, the growing relevance of blood in the Iberian social ordering was parallel to the Portuguese arrival in India, and parallel to their uses of the word “casta” to identify certain Indian social groups. Until then, it was religion, not blood, which was the main criteria of social differentiation.<sup>17</sup> In addition, the word “casta” was not as successful as a social label in the Iberian metropolitan territories as it was overseas.

How and why did the Portuguese select this word from the available encyclopedia of social vocabulary to identify, compress, and translate into Portuguese terms, a social world that was extremely rich and diversified? Did the semantic features of the word “casta” stimulate its selection in certain historical situations? Furthermore, why was this word (and not another one), later adopted by the English, Dutch and Indians to identify Indian society? Finally, how did the uses of this word affect European and Indian conceptual and social systems?

While the answer to the last questions has already received much attention from scholarship, in the next pages I will engage into responding to the first through an analysis of the uses of the word in the context of the Portuguese Empire in Asia.<sup>18</sup> This analysis is based on six narratives about the Portuguese presence in India, several letters and religious treatises, as well as legal documents produced in India where the word appears. Eighteenth-century vocabularies and dictionaries were also considered in order to map the semantic evolution of “casta” and understand whether the

16. A vast encyclopedia of social categories was available since the Middle Ages. However, people that were considered “different” were not only the ones that were not of Portuguese descent. On that, see Hespanha.

17. Fernanda Olival, “Rigor e interesses: os estatutos de limpeza de sangue em Portugal”, *Cadernos de Estudos Sefarditas* 4 (2004): 151-182; João de Figueiroa Rego, *A honra alheia por um fio. Os estatutos de limpeza de sangue nos espaços de expressão ibérica (secs. XVI-XVIII)* (Lisbon: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 2011).

18. Pragmatics sub-field of Linguistics (namely the concepts of inference and implicature), the Cambridge School of Intellectual Thought, as well as *Begriffsgeschichte* methodologies inspired my approach. More direct challenges are the questioning offered by the books by Jean-Frédéric Schaub, *Pour une histoire politique de la race* (Paris: Seuil, 2015), Bethencourt, Guha, and the earlier essay by Ania Loomba, “Race and the Possibilities of Comparative Critique”, *New Literary History* 40.3 (2009): 501-522.



colonial experiences added new meanings to it, shaping its future uses by people acting in the world, but also by people theorizing about it.

Even if in this essay I mainly concentrate on the sixteenth-century Portuguese experience in the Indian Ocean, I bear in mind (and invite the reader to do so, as well) the Atlantic, the Mexican case, and the Iberian Union period (1580-1640), when the circulation of this word through the four parts of the world occurred more frequently.<sup>19</sup> The period usually called “the early-modern period” (from the sixteenth century up to the eighteenth century) is the larger scenario of this enquiry. However, caste experiences went well beyond the presence of the Europeans in Asia and in the Atlantic, and their chronologies. In the case of India, namely, it is unavoidable to discuss the role of the Mughals and other princes and principalities (as well as the Dutch and the French, besides the British, of course) in the shaping of caste as a social category.

[97]

### The Uses of the Word “Casta” in the Early-modern Indian World

If we follow the Goan Sebastião Dalgado’s *Glossário Luso-Asiático*, published between 1919 and 1921, Portuguese had brought to the Indian world the word “castas”, meaning, mainly, “race” and “species”: “The Portuguese used this word of their language, later adopted by other Europeans, with the meaning of ‘species, race’, to refer to the singular social systems of division of the people that operates in India”.<sup>20</sup> Dalgado considered that the word matched perfectly the Indian social system developed since the *Rig Veda* (the period of the *Laws of Manu*). He also remembered that the original local name for “casta” was “varna”, which meant color: white corresponding to the Aryans, who had conquered the north of India, and black to the dasyas, the local population. The migration of the Aryans to the south had helped to propagate the system throughout all India, as well as its complexification.

Albeit helpful, since it offers a list of quotations where the word “casta” was used since the sixteenth century until the early twentieth century,<sup>21</sup> the

19. On that circulation and world impact see the classical work by Serge Gruzinski, *Les quatre parties du monde* (Paris: Éditions de la Martinière, 2004).

20. Sebastião Dalgado, *Glossário Luso-Asiático*, vol. 1 (Coimbra: Imprensa da Universidade, 1919) 225-226. On the theme of Aryan migration, see the classical work of Thomas Trautmann, *Aryans and British India* (Berkeley-Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997).

21. Dalgado 225-229.

[98]

*Glossário* of Dalgado is a typical orientalist product, subject to a specific intellectual imagination, and should be read carefully. Dalgado does not question, for example, the junction of the words “varna” and “casta”. He just assumes that one means the other. In addition, he does not question why caste had become the main Indian social category. For Dalgado, castes existed, and that was it. Like Dalgado, the majority of scholarship of Portuguese origin on Indian castes followed (and frequently follows) the same kind of understanding.<sup>22</sup>

What happens when we revisit the original historical sources where the word appeared and identify their contexts of utterance (both external and internal to the respective texts)? Which words were used, and with which meanings? How did “casta” appear in the text?

Álvaro Velho, author of the *Diario da Viagem de Vasco da Gama* (1498), the very first synthesis about Portuguese-Indian encounters, did not use the word “casta”. In a rich description of the trip of Vasco da Gama, and the encounters with African and Asian populations, Velho chooses, instead, a typical social vocabulary in order to identify the people he met. He combined the words “men”, “women” and “children”, “kings” and “soldiers”, “lords” and “knights”, “honored people”, as well as “Christians” and “Moors”, to describe different societies.<sup>23</sup> On one hand, Velho probably did not have the necessary cognitive distance to find a “new word” to describe “new societies”. He used, of course, those words he found familiar. On the other hand, the word “casta” did not occur to Velho’s memory probably because it was not in common use in the Portuguese kingdom yet. When Velho writes, Jewish and Moors were being expelled and converted, “New Christians” was the

22. Bragança Pereira, *O sistema das castas (ensaio historico-sociologico)* (Goa: Imprensa Nacional, 1920); Voicunta Camotim, *Os bramanes sarasvatas de Goa* (Nova Goa: Minerva Indiana, 1929); K. S. Singh, ed. *People of Goa* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan Pvt. Ltd., 1993); A. Faria de Moraes, *A Índia e as castas* (Lisbon: Agência Geral do Ultramar, 1944); Mariano Feio, *As castas Hindus de Goa* (Lisbon: Junta de Investigações Científicas do Ultramar, 1979); or the more recent Maria de Jesus dos Mártires Lopes, *Goa Setecentista, Tradição e Modernidade* (Lisbon: Universidade Católica Portuguesa, 1996). In 1989, Maria Selma Vieira Velho, “As possíveis influências dos viajantes em algumas sociedades costeiras das partes do Oriente”, *Studia* 49 (1989): 397-421, already defended the idea that the original meanings of “caste” were much wider than the later uses of it.

23. Álvaro Velho, *Diario da Viagem de Vasco da Gama* (Lisbon: Livraria Civilização, 1945) 46-47, 51, 52, 55. The “diary” of Álvaro Velho circulated as a manuscript until its first edition in 1838.

newborn social category, and the “early-modern” question of purity of blood (which would be associated with caste and would become a crucial principle of distinction), was taking its first steps.

One or two decades later, the transformations in social and intellectual contexts of Portuguese travelers and imperial agents were already visible in their lexical choices, which may help explain the presence of the word “casta” in Duarte Barbosa’s writings. Possibly the first travel writer to use it, somewhere between 1512 and 1515, in *The book of Duarte Barbosa*, this author did not apply the word “casta” to identify every social group he met in India.<sup>24</sup> He mainly used it to refer to groups that combined endogamy and occupation (something that was very common in the Portuguese medieval corporations too) like the “casta de Nayres”, a martial group with endogamic practices. The expression Barbosa prefers to identify Indian social groups was, however, “ley de gente” (type of people). He frequently used, too, the qualifiers “alvo”, “branco”, “quase branco”, “baço”, and “preto” (niveous, white, almost white, dim and black) as part of a hierarchy that started with “alvo” (the whitest) in the top, and “preto” (the darkest) in the bottom. Adding to that, Barbosa was also interested in “civilizational” issues, such as the “courtesy”, “hygiene”, and “food habits” of Indian people. His different “leys de gente” were identified through these criteria, and, in general, for Barbosa the “whites” were more civil than the “black”.<sup>25</sup>

[99]

In short, even if he was the first to assign the word “casta” to certain Indian social groups, its use was random when compared with the two other languages of difference Barbosa was more familiar with (civility and color). Nevertheless, Barbosa used the word as a common noun, and in analytical terms, as in the sentence “guardandose de misturar ha casta com

24. *Livro em que dá relação do que vio e ouvio no Oriente Duarte Barbosa* (Lisbon: Agência Geral das Colónias, 1946) The first print edition of parts of this book can be found as *Il libro di Odoardo Barbessa* in Giovanni Battista Ramusio, *Primo volume delle nauigationi et viaggi nel qual si contiene la descrittione dell’Africa, et del paese del Prete Ianni, con varii viaggi, dal mar Rosso a Calicut & infin all’isole Molucche, dove nascono le Spetiere et la navigatione attorno il mondo: li nomi de gli auttori, et le nauigationi, et i viaggi piu particolarmente si mostrano nel foglio seguente* (Venice: appresso gli heredi di Lucantonio Giunti, 1550).

25. *Livro em que dá relação...* 17-18, 21, 23, 41, 54-61, 64-66, 77-78, 92, 103-104, 127, 140, 157-160, 177, 191. The reader should keep in mind that in English editions of Barbosa, “ley de gente” was translated as “caste”. See, for example, *The Book of Duarte Barbosa*, ed. Mansel Longworth Dames (London: Hakluyt Society, 1918-1921).

outra *casta*” (avoiding the mixing of one caste with another caste), allowing its upgrading to the position of a social category. In addition, the lengthy descriptions of Brahmans and Naires of Vijayanagar and of the Malabar Coast, as well as of eighteen different “leys de gente” with severe restrictions in communicating with the others, helped to consider that “leys de gente” and “castas” were, somehow, one and the same thing.<sup>26</sup>

[100]

In the same years, Tomé Pires also used the word “casta” to refer to certain social groups of South India. Like Barbosa, Pires in his *Summa Oriental* used it to describe the Brahmans, the Naires, and other social groups, considering that there was a hierarchy between them: there were the upper castes (the Brahmans and the Naires, for example) and the lower ones, being the lower tendentially poorer and less virtuous. Adding to that, Pires also used the word to differentiate the several “nations” that inhabited Asia.<sup>27</sup>

Besides travelers, other agents of the Portuguese Empire and abroad used the word “casta”. This is very explicit in a translation of a letter of an ambassador of the zamorin of Calecut to king D. Manuel, which refers to the “casta” of “Chatins”. Since we do not know anything further about the ambassador, it is impossible to know, from this translation, whether the Indians had already adopted the word to identify themselves when they were communicating with the Portuguese. However, the translation of this letter shows that since the beginning of the sixteenth century, the Portuguese were selecting “casta” as a convenient label of identification of certain Indian social groups and/or nations.<sup>28</sup>

In *Lendas da Índia* (another classical narrative about the Portuguese presence in India, in the first half of the sixteenth century), Gaspar Correia uses it a few times. On one hand, to identify the nation of Gonçalo de Pavia, from the Canary Islands; on the other, to describe the Naires, showing that this group had a strong identity that attracted the attention of the Portuguese-

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26. *Livro em que dá relação...* 120-162.

27. Armando Cortesão, *The Suma Oriental of Tomé Pires* [1944] (New Delhi: Publisher Asian Educational Services, 1990). Giovanni Battista Ramusio reproduced parts of *Summa Oriental*.

28. Embaixador do rei de Calecut, “Carta de D. João, embaixador do rei de Calecut, a el-rei D. Manuel, expondo os privilégios dos chatins, a cuja casta pertencia, e pedindo um braço de armas, o habito de Christo, e a jurisdição dos chatins e naires que se fizessem christãos”, *Cartas de Affonso de Albuquerque*, vol. III, ed. Raymundo Antonio de Bulhão Pato (Lisbon: Academia Real das Sciencias de Lisboa, 1903) 208-209.

se, both by its familiarity and its difference. Correia reports, too, that when Vasco da Gama asked an Indian man about his caste in 1502, he answered “Naire Bramane”. This was a kind of social impossibility, since Brahmans and Naires were different social groups. Inventing the group “Naire Bramane”, the Indian man combined in one person the two most powerful social groups of Malabar society. He was playing with the Portuguese ignorance about the inner characteristics of Malabar society, and perhaps trying to take advantage from it. Correia also refers to a dialogue with the Adil Shah of Bijapur, in which a Portuguese captain used, again, the word.<sup>29</sup>

[101]

Like Barbosa and Pires, Correia was writing from India. João de Barros, who wrote his *Décadas da Ásia*, published for the first time in the 1550s, mainly sitting in his office at Casa da Índia, in Lisbon, operated with a similar world of meanings. The same happened with Fernão Lopes de Castanheda, the author of *Historia do descobrimento e conquista da Índia pelos Portuguezes*, also published in that decade, who wrote in Portugal after being in India for several years. However, in contrast with the others, they also applied the word to differentiate “religions” (“casta dos mouros”, for example), helping to build the association between “religion” and “blood” as part of caste characteristics.<sup>30</sup>

Nonetheless, some specific aspects of Indian behavior were recurrent in the uses of the word “casta” in these narratives: namely, the fact that many Indians could neither marry nor eat together with people of another “casta”. In the *Chronica de D. Manuel* (1566) written by Damião de Góis, one of the most important Portuguese historical and identity narratives of the sixteenth century, this *topos* structured the description Góis provided of the Brahmans and of the Naires of the Malabar Coast, contributing to its dissemination among the Portuguese elites, its main audience.<sup>31</sup> Religious narratives and documents discussed these characteristics too. Jesuit letters of this period were full of references to them, as well as to strategies of conversion that were

29. Gaspar Correia, *Lendas da Índia* (Lisbon: Typographia da Academia Real das Sciencias, 1858) t. i, P. i, 6, 75, 326; t. ii, P. i, 107, 321; t. iii, P. i, 67.

30. João de Barros, *Décadas da Ásia*, ed. Hernâni Cidade (Lisbon: Agência Geral das Colónias, 1945) D. i, L. 1, 31; L. 6, 243; L. 8, 323-324; L. 10, 399; D. ii, L. 1, 20; L. 5, 237, 243; D. iii, L. 4, 191. Fernão Lopes de Castanheda, *Historia do descobrimento e conquista da Índia pelos Portuguezes* (Lisbon: Typographia Rollandiana, 1833) L. 3, 23, 33, 144, 239.

31. Damião de Góis, *Chronica do Serenissimo Senhor Rei D. Manuel* (Lisbon: Off. Miguel Manescal da Costa, 1749) P. i, 50-52, 312, 392, 415.

[102]

aware of caste differences. The first Provincial Council of Goa, of 1567, and as later councils, stated that in “certain parts of this Province” (that is to say, in certain parts of Estado da Índia), Indians were divided into “generations” (lineages) and “castes” of higher and lower dignity. For the clerics in these assemblies, lineages and castes were different things, with caste rules stricter than lineage ones. They reminded, for example, that eating together could be a reason to lose one’s position in the local caste hierarchy, a restriction that did not apply to lineage.<sup>32</sup>

Further analysis of sixteenth-century Portuguese writings from India or about India continues to be illustrative. It shows that the Portuguese and Europeans settled in the overseas territories used the word more frequently, either when communicating with the kingdom or between themselves, than those that lived in Portugal.<sup>33</sup> Secondly, it demonstrates that by the end of the sixteenth century, in the context of the Iberian Union, “casta” had truly become a common sense word among the Portuguese settled in Asia. Thirdly, the spectrum of meanings continued to be wide, even if among certain groups (namely missionaries) there was a gradual compression of them. Still, until the eighteenth-century Estado da Índia, “casta” was mainly used to identify social groups and nations. Some people used the word in one way, others, in the other, while a few combined both meanings. Frequently, it referred to endogamic practices, namely constraints relating to marriage and commensality.<sup>34</sup> In all cases, the uses of the word presupposed a conscience of hierarchy and difference.

Still, caste neither described *all Indian society* nor identified *only endogamic groups*. The full condensation of meanings and its expansion as a social category with certain characteristics resulted from a combination of different discursive practices, different channels of communication (Por-

32. “Primeiro Concílio Provincial de Goa”, *Archivo Portuguez Oriental*, vol. 4, ed. J.H. Cunha Rivara (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1992) 8.

33. A search in digitalized early-modern historical sources as the 12 volumes of *Gavetas da Torre do Tombo* (Lisbon: Centro de Estudos Históricos Ultramarinos, 1960-1977) or in the archives of Portuguese Inquisition is very illustrative of this assumption. Good examples are “Carta de Tristão de Ataíde a el-rei D. João III e Portugal, na qual lhe fala da sua viagem a Maluco. Maluco, 1534”, *Gavetas da Torre do Tombo*, vol. 9, 8-20; or “Carta de Antonio Correia a el-rei D. João III, na qual lhe dizia os seus serviços feitos na India e pedia merce por eles. Cochym, 1548, Janeiro, 6”, *Gavetas da Torre do Tombo*, vol. 5, 17-30.

34. Cortesão 67, 72, 81, 143.

tuguese, British, Dutch, French and Indian, at least), and several contexts of reception (Indian, European and other).

The “multinational” Jesuit networks (among other missionaries) contributed to these dynamics. The intense debates that opposed members of the Jesuit order, in the first decades of the seventeenth century, and their diffusion throughout all Europe, helped this word to gain relevance not only in India, but also beyond. The debate between Roberto di Nobili and Gonçalo Fernandes Trancoso, studied by Ines Zupanov, is illustrative.<sup>35</sup> However, previous and future discussions were taking place, and other books were produced. Many of them, long before these debates; others, at the same time or after them, like the *Livro da Seita dos Índios Gentios* (which includes a list of prohibited behavior of people belonging to certain castes of South Asia) or the later Franciscan book, *Viagens pela Índia*, which has detailed references to castes, their occupations, and their differences in India.<sup>36</sup>

[103]

In addition to this type of sources that allow us to map the world of meanings the word “casta” had in the Indian world in the context of the Portuguese Empire, we should give special attention to the legal and administrative uses of the word “casta”. In contrast with the previous narratives, but frequently in direct interplay with them, this presence could entail immediate consequences, contributing to organize local societies into “castes”. This process of perception, identification and policy-making helped, of course, to rigidify, in the Portuguese territories, social dynamics that apparently were, at the time of the arrival of the Portuguese, much more fluid and diverse. We have already referred to the decrees of the first Provincial Council of Goa and their understandings of Indian society. They served as a mandatory template for the clerics and religious orders established in Asia in the

35. Ines G. Županov, *Disputed Mission. Jesuit Experiments and Brahmanical Knowledge in Seventeenth-Century India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009).

36. Jacopo Fenicio, *The Livro da Seita dos Índios Gentios* [c. 1619], ed. Jarl Charpentier (Paris-Cambridge-Uppsala-Leipzig-Haag: Librairie ANC. H. Champion / W. Heffer & Sons / Almqvist & Wiksells / Otto Harrosswitz / Martinus Nijhoff, 1953) 68; “Viagem pela Índia”. Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal (BNP), Lisboa, Reservados, Cod. 846. Like these treatises, the Jesuit letters of the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, as well as documents related with them, are full of references to “castas”. This happened not only in India, but also in other parts of Asia. See, for example, Santi Francisci Xavierii and Alessandro Valignano, “Processus Malacensis, 1556”, *Monumenta Xaveriana, ex autographis vel ex antiquioribus exemplis collecta* (Madrid: Gabrielis Lopez del Horno, 1912) 415, 918.



[104]

context of the Portuguese “padroado”, helping them “to know” the people with whom they were interacting. In addition, vice regal decrees, following the prescriptions coming out of the Council of Trent and its reception by the Portuguese Crown, almost replicated some of these decrees, enlarging their social impact. The word was present in earlier and later royal and vice regal documents and decrees too. Either to ask about the castes of certain people, to defend the privileges of castes considered “noble”, or to derogate their social position, soon the Portuguese in India and the Indians used the word “casta” to reinforce or to contest the social order and the location of a particular group in it.<sup>37</sup>

For the Indian case, these criticisms have in Mateus de Castro the best seventeenth-century illustration.<sup>38</sup> In the treatise *Espelho de Bramanes*, this catholic Goan questioned the superiority of the Portuguese in relation to the Indians. Castro openly accused the Portuguese in Goa of being mixed-blood, sons and daughters of low-caste Indian women (market-women, Malabars, Bengalis and blacks) and low condition Portuguese men, very inferior to the Brahmins to which he belonged. Therefore, there was no reason for the Brahmins to continue to be subaltern to the Portuguese, at least in the way they were until then.<sup>39</sup> In the previous sentence, Mateus de Castro’s meaning

37. Fernão de Albuquerque, “Carta de Fernão de Albuquerque, governador, para Filipe de Oliveira”, Goa, Sep. 11, 1620. Historical Archives of Goa (HAG), Goa, Livro dos Reis Vizinhos 1, foils 128-128v; “Descripcion de la India Oriental. Gobierno de ella y sucesos acaecidos en el año 1639”. Biblioteca Nacional (BNM), Madrid, Códice n.º 3.015, ff. 109-110. In favor of a man of the “casta dos malabares”, see “Carta dos mordomos e confrades da Confraria de Nossa Senhora do Rosário de Coulão para o rei. Coulão, 28 de Dezembro de 1588”. Arquivo Geral de Simancas (AGS), Simancas, Secretarias Provinciales, Codice n.º 1551, ff. 352-352v, 356-356v; and against the “chingalas”, see “Da despesa da ilha de Ceilão do que se despendeu com os ordenados e ordinárias e todos os meses que nella se fazem”. HAG, Goa, Livro das Monções, n.º 19-D.

38. Giuseppe Sorge, *Matteo de Castro (1594-1677) profilo di una figura emblematica del conflitto giurisdizionale tra Goa e Roma nel secolo 17* (Bologna: CLUEB, 1986). See also Ângela Barreto Xavier, “O lustre do seu sangue. Bramanismo e tópicos de distinção no contexto português”, *Tempo* 16-30 (2011): 71-99; and Patricia Souza e Faria, “Mateus de Castro: um bispo ‘brâmane’ em busca da promoção social no império asiático português (século XVII)”, *Revista Eletrônica de História do Brasil* 9.2 (2007): 30-43.

39. Mateus de Castro, “Espelho de Brâmanes”, *Matteo de Castro (1594-1677) profilo di una figura emblematica del conflitto giurisdizionale tra Goa e Roma nel secolo 17*, Giuseppe Sorge (Bologna: CLUEB, 1986) 78.



of “casta” still oscillated between the idea of a social group and that of a nation or, even, of a race. In fact, it is not clear whether Castro considered the Brahmans as a nation or as a social group, and this hesitation persisted in the way he introduced himself to the ecclesiastic authorities in Rome, where he said that he belonged to the “casta dos brâmanes”.<sup>40</sup>

A similar oscillation continues to be present in other texts of this period. Half a century later, the understanding of “casta” as a nation is still present in the *Espelho de David contra o Golias do Bramanismo*, a book against the Brahmans of Goa, written by father João da Cunha Jaques, of the caste of Charodos. For Jaques, caste was the right word to differentiate nations:

[105]

Someone/a person who has been born Portuguese will always be a Portuguese, and will never be an Italian, even if he wants to, because the nation and the Portuguese caste that differentiates him from the Italian is inseparable, and he can never leave or lose.<sup>41</sup>

Because of that, Jaques refused to attribute the label “casta” to the Brahmans, whom, he argued, were not a nation but only a social group of lower origins. This thesis about the lower status of the Brahmans was already present in previous books, like the *Livro da Seita dos Gentios* of Jacopo Fenicio, where, in contrast with Jaques, Fenicio uses the word “casta” to describe the Brahmans as “a nation”.<sup>42</sup>

By the second half of the seventeenth century, Goan local elites, Christian and non-Christian, had completely appropriated the word. Reports of the first decades of the next century, written by non-Christian Goans, demonstrate the intensity of this appropriation. For example, one of these reports associated caste with other familiar social rules, and stated:

No one ignores that the first requisite to marry is the equality of blood and nobility of husband and wife; if there is difference between them concerning the blood, the superior one refuses the alliance. This is a common practice in the world, especially among the natives of this

40. “Mateus de Castro Mahalo, sacerdote goês e procurador dos padres da casta dos brâmanes, suplica ao Papa Urbano VIII a autorização para o padre agostinho Diogo de Santa Ana poder fundar um mosteiro para freiras”, Jan. 8, 1637. Archivio della Sacra Congregazione della Propaganda Fide (ASCPF), Vatican City, Memoriali, vol. 399, ff. 212, 215v.

41. João da Cunha Jaques, “Espada de David contra o Golias do Bramanismo”. Biblioteca da Ajuda (BA), Lisboa, Códices, 49-ii-9, f. 10v.

42. Fenicio 68.

land. They belong to different castes and do not mix with those that do not belong to the same caste.<sup>43</sup>

Parallel to these Portuguese and local (*id est*, Indian uses in the context of the Portuguese Estado da Índia) uses of the word, when did the word “casta” start to be used by other Europeans to identify Indian social groups?

[106]

Again, Jesuits were important actors of this process, since there were Spanish, Italian, Flemish, British and French among those that arrived in Asia, already in the sixteenth century, in the context of the Portuguese “padroado”. Many of them used the word “casta” in their letters to Rome or to other counterparts in Europe.<sup>44</sup> The word was also present in some of the best-sellers of this period, like Jan Huyghen van Linschoten’s *Itinerario* and Gianbattista Ramusio’s *Navigazioni*. Linschoten used the words “kaste” and “kasten” to identify social groups of the Malabar Coast, like the Naires; and before him, the *Navigazioni* used the word “casta” too.<sup>45</sup> A very similar word, at least, phonetically, was already in use in Northern European countries. Since the Middle Ages, “casten” (in English), “kasta” (old Norse), “kastōnā” (in old German), “kaste” (among the Danish) and kasta (in Swedish) circulated in those countries. Their meanings were very different (mainly “to throw”) from the Iberian ones.<sup>46</sup> Still, the phonetic affinities between all these words probably facilitated future borrowings. Mapping these uses is not possible in this short essay, but this diagnosis is essential in order to have a deeper understanding of the semantic evolution and the future “success” of “casta”.

### The Semantics of “Casta” in Eighteenth-century Iberia

The *Vocabulario portuguez & latino* of Raphael Bluteau, published between 1712 and 1728, in Lisbon, and the *Diccionario de Autoridades*, pu-

43. Bramanes Cortalos, “Memorial que os Bramanes Cortalos fizeram”, HAG, Lisboa, Livro das Monções, vol. 101, ff. 738-740v. On that, see Ângela Barreto Xavier, “Purity of Blood and Caste. Identity Narratives in Goan Elites”, *Race and Blood in the Iberian World*, eds. Max S. Hering Torres, María Elena Martínez and David Nirenberg (Berlin & London: LIT Verlag, 2012) 125-149.

44. Dalgado 228-229.

45. Ramusio 92; Jan Huyghen van Linschoten, *Itinerario, voyage ofte schipvaert naer Oost ofte Portugaels Indien. Tweede stuk*, eds. H. Kern and H. Terpstra (Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1955) 36, 37.

46. See <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/cast>.

blished between 1726 and 1739 in Madrid, are a good start to understand the similarities between these uses and the metropolitan Iberian imagination on caste during the early modern period. These two works were repositories of Iberian social knowledge, and, in a certain way, an ending point of two or three centuries of imperial encounters.<sup>47</sup>

In *Diccionario de Autoridades*, the search of the words “casta”, “casto” and “castizo” is enlightening. “Casta” identifies social groups, meaning the “generation and lineage of well-known parents”.<sup>48</sup> This positive meaning evokes, of course, the role that “purity of blood” still had in Iberian social imagination. Secondly, “casta” refers to animals, but with the same meaning: “it is also applied to different lineages of horses, bulls and other animals, because they were generated by fathers known for their loyalty, bravery or other circumstance that makes of them distinct and singular”.<sup>49</sup> In both cases, the word differentiated certain groups of people and animals, elevating them (because of their well-known lineage, generation, genealogy). Physical reproduction and “the origins” are also the meanings associated with its uses in the realm of plants.<sup>50</sup>

If “casta” meant that, “castizo” was, consequently, the person whose “origins” and “caste” were known, but also “pure”.<sup>51</sup> This is an important addition, since it associated good origin with “purity of blood”, therefore, excluding from the “castizos” mixed-blood people.

[107]

47. Raphael Bluteau, *Vocabulario portuguez & latino* (Coimbra: Collegio das Artes da Companhia de Jesus, 1712-1728). Available at: <http://dicionarios.bbm.usp.br/pt-br/dicionario/edicao/1>; Real Academia Española, *Diccionario de la lengua castellana* (Madrid: F. del Hierro, 1726-1739). Available at: <http://www.rae.es/recursos/diccionarios/diccionarios-antiores-1726-1996/diccionario-de-autoridades>.

48. “Generacion y linage que viene de Padres conocidos” in the original version.

49. “Se llama también el distinto linage de los caballos, toros y otros animals, porque vienen de padres conocidos por su lealtad, fiereza ù otra circunstancia, que los haze señalado y particulares” in the original version.

50. “Casta”, *Diccionario de la lengua castellana*, t. 2. Available at: <http://web.frl.es/DA.html>. As Laura A. Lewis has pointed out, a similar meaning can be found in Sebastián de Covarrubias’ *Tesoro de la lengua castellana* of the early 17<sup>th</sup> century. See Laura A. Lewis, “Between ‘Casta’ and ‘Raza’. The example of colonial Mexico”, *Race and Blood in the Iberian World*, eds. Max S. Hering Torres, María Elena Martínez and David Nirenberg (Berlin & London: LIT Verlag, 2012) 103-104.

51. “Castizo”, *Diccionario de la lengua castellana*, t. 2. Available at: <http://web.frl.es/DA.html>.

[108]

In the *Diccionario*, the roots of “casta” and “castizo” were the Latin words *stirps*, *natio*, *genus*, and *progenies*, even if it is likely that the gothic word “kastan” was underlying them. However, the word “casta” was etymologically close to the Latin word *castus* (chaste), or *castanum* (brown and chestnut). This proximity is relevant in the moment of understanding its broader meanings too. In fact, being “casto” meant to be “honest, pure, and virginal”, virtues that should be followed both by single and married people. “Castos” were prohibited to have sexual intercourse or sexual thoughts outside the marriage vows. This was a condition of their and their children’s “purity”. Similarly, the proximity to *castanum*, simultaneously the fruit (chestnut) and the color (brown), may have helped its attribution to people who had a color closer to brown than the Iberians did. This means that even if they were not directly evoked in the definitions provided by the *Diccionario*, there were elective affinities between “casta”, “castizo”, “casto”, “estirpe”, “nacion”, “puro”, and *castanum*, *castus*, *stirps*, *natio*, *genus*, *progenies*, *purus*, *incompactus*. They all could belong to the same order of discourse.

The definitions provided in Bluteau’s *Vocabulario* are similar. “Casta” refers again to generation and lineage; secondly, to noble people; and thirdly, to family, being associated also to the Latin words *genus* and *stirps*. In addition, Bluteau refers the uses of the word in the realms of plants and animals. However, the fact that Bluteau evokes the experience of “casta” among the “gentiles” of India is more relevant. For him, Indians were so “superstitious” and concerned with “difference”, “nobility”, and “caste”, that they did not want any kind of communication and contact with a member of another “caste”. The difficult relationship between Indians and Portuguese was, according to Bluteau, a confirmation of this. An Indian considered that communication with a Portuguese would corrupt him. For this reason, after meeting one, he would perform rituals of purification. Bluteau referred the treatise *Jadulgatutan* (translated by the Portuguese as *Pomar das Castas*), which circulated in the Indian territories under Portuguese dominion, to explain the existence of four main “castas” in India (the Rajas, the Brahmans, the Chatins and the Balalas), sub-divided into one hundred ninety-six. In Bluteau, who cites seventeenth-century sources, the Manu’s theory of varnas had already been translated into a theory of castes where the Rajas were the first and the Brahmans the second (against other narratives, which proposed the inverse ordering). There was still another division of castes:

the castes of the right hand, and the ones of the left hand. All of them were inferior to the first four.<sup>52</sup>

This “Asian” presence in the understanding of the world of “casta” reappears when Bluteau considers the word “castiço”. “Castiço” was a son of a Portuguese father and mother, born in India. After this initial definition, the meaning of “castiço” is similar to its meanings in *Autoridades*. However, Bluteau adds to the “positive meanings” of “castiço”, the possibility of “degeneration”. Explaining that the word “degenerado” belonged to the same etymological family of *gens*, and therefore of “generation”, Bluteau reminded that “castiço” was “generous”, that is to say, the one that had not “degenerated” (in opposition to the mestizo, for example, frequently the result of fornication).<sup>53</sup> Then and again, the “castizo” was tendentially “chaste”, since he was the product of the moral virtue of “chastity”.<sup>54</sup>

[109]

Besides all these variations, there were interesting affinities between the words “casta” and the early-modern uses of “raza” or “raça”. When exploring *Vocabulario* and *Diccionario*, the results are surprising, indeed. The first definition Bluteau attributes to the word “raça” is no other than “casta”. However, he immediately associates “raça” with “bad generation” and “bad lineage”. As Bluteau explained, “ter raça” was the same as saying to be of Jewish or Moorish ascent. Similarly, in *Diccionario de Autoridades* “raza” is also defined as caste or quality of the lineage, which, when applied to humanity, referred to a negative genealogy.<sup>55</sup> In this period, “casta” and “raza” could be interchangeable, but the positive meanings of “casta” are probably related with its affinity with the world of “chastity”. In contrast, “raza” pointed immediately towards the realm of animals, and to the kind of behavior associated with them. Depending on the concrete uses of the

52. “Casta”, *Vocabulario portuguez & latino*, vol. 1, 183-184, and supplement to vol. 1, 205-206. Available at: <http://www.brasiliana.usp.br/en/dicionario/1/casta>. The 3rd chapter of the 3rd book of Abul’ Fazl’s *Ain-In-I-Akbari* is a great source of information to consider, in comparative terms, the ways how Indian society was understood and described by different agents. See Abul’ Fazl, *The A-In-I-Akbari*, vol. II (New Delhi: Low Price Publications, 2006).
53. “Castiço”, *Vocabulario portuguez & latino*, vol. 1, 187-188. Available at: <http://www.brasiliana.usp.br/en/dicionario/1/casti%C3%A7o>.
54. “Casto”, *Vocabulario portuguez & latino*, vol. 2, 190. Available at: <http://www.brasiliana.usp.br/en/dicionario/1/casto>.
55. “Raça”, *Vocabulario portuguez & latino*, vol. 7, 86. Available at: <http://www.brasiliana.usp.br/en/dicionario/1/ra%C3%A7a>; and “Raza”, *Diccionario de la lengua castellana*, t. v, 1737. Available at: <http://web.frl.es/DA.html>.

word and the concrete contexts of interpretation, “caste” was somehow between “chaste” and “race”, between the purity of blood and the infected one, between the realm of humans and the realm of animals.

### From the Indian World to the Atlantic

[110]

As said before, the frequency of the word was higher in India than in the kingdom of Portugal. The Portuguese living in Portugal used the word, but its use was random. People applied it, as a category, mainly to the realms of plants and animals. The presence of caste was overwhelming, instead, when used as a qualifier of good behavior, like being chaste, a central virtue in the early modern Portugal.

However, by the end of the sixteenth century, the Portuguese and other Europeans settled in India commonly applied the word to distinguish certain Indian social groups. It had already become a social category. Furthermore, “casta” was fully incorporated by the metropolitan world as a social category used to identify Indians, as it can be seen by the relevance given to it in Bluteau’s *Vocabulary* (in contrast with what happens in *Diccionario de Autoridades*, for example). Colonial experience did have an impact in the construction of caste as a common sense social category in the Portuguese world. This category would mainly be applied, eventually, to Indian social groups.

What explains this difference? Why did the Portuguese abroad selected it to perceive and describe humans, while, when at home, this use was not so immediate and obvious? Is the scale of civility that operated in the Portuguese world somehow related with these differences? Since “casta” was initially used to refer plants and animals, was it less appropriated to refer “metropolitan” Portuguese, whose humanity was unquestionable? Inventories of goods, where cattle and slaves were located in the same category of commodities, are very telling about the easy associations established between humanity and beasts. In some of them, the word “casta” also appears. Was there an ambivalence, a hesitation, even an anxiety, that shaped the ways the Portuguese operated in the moment of finding the right words to define new things (Indian social groups)?

Further analysis is needed in order to answer properly these questions. Still, in contrast with the previous hypothesis, the findings of this essay show that in early modern India, the uses of “casta” associated it more with “chaste” and “castus” than with “raza”. The association with “raza” (which evoked immediately the realm of animals, as well as the people of Jewish and

Moorish ascent) was rare in early modern India. When Sebastião Dalgado later associate the two words, he did it in an ideological context (the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century) where the word “race” had become a Koselleckian “basic concept” too.<sup>56</sup>

If in India the “animal link” does not explain the selection of the word by the Portuguese, some data indicates that in Brazil these uses could be otherwise, as John Manuel Monteiro has already demonstrated.<sup>57</sup> What happened in the Atlantic, then? Can we find differences in the uses of the word “casta”? Did it have a similar impact in the Atlantic societies as it had in the Indian (Asian) one?

[111]

These questions invite us to expand this enquiry to the Atlantic world. My aim is to engage, in the near future, in a comparison between the circulation and dissemination of the word “casta” in the Indian and in the Atlantic worlds, focusing on Mexico, the immediate counterpart of the Indian experience. This comparison requires, obviously, several methodological precautions. However, I am convinced that we need to pursue it in order to complexify our understandings of the experiences of caste in the early-modern period.

The Mexican system has not been interpreted yet as the key to understanding contemporary Mexico, even if some of its diachronic consequences were very explicit in the nineteenth-century “guerra das castas”.<sup>58</sup> Neither has it had a similar impact in the building of Western social theory. Also in contrast with the Indian castes, where endogamy prevailed, mixed-blood people constituted Mexican castes. Another difference is that occupation (a

56. On the early connections between race, color and quality in the New Kingdom of Granada, see : Max S. Hering Torres, “Color, pureza y raza: la calidad de los sujetos coloniales”, *La cuestión colonial*, ed. Heraclio Bonilla (Bogotá: Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 2011) 451-470.

57. John M. Monteiro, “The Heathen Castes of Sixteenth-Century Portuguese America: Unity, Diversity, and the Invention of the Brazilian Indians”, *Hispanic American Historical Review* 80.4 (2000): 697-719.

58. Since the literature is very vast, I will refer to few works: Sergio Quezada, *Bibliografía comentada sobre la cuestión étnica y la guerra de castas de Yucatán, 1821-1910* (Mérida: Universidad Autónoma de Yucatán / Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1986); Javier Rodríguez Piña, *Guerra de castas: la venta de indios mayas a Cuba, 1848-1861* (México: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 1990); Terry Rugeley, *Yucatán's Maya Peasantry and the Origins of the Caste War* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996); Terry Rugeley, *Rebellion Now and Forever: Mayas, Hispanics, and Caste War Violence in Yucatán, 1800-1880* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009).



variable that was important in the Indian case) was not crucial in Mexico either. Instead, the quality of people “calidad”, somehow absent as such in the Indian experience, was a relevant variable to assign someone to a certain Mexican caste.<sup>59</sup> Finally, the question of race has been considered as an essential part of the Mexican case, while for the Indian castes, race discussions are almost absent.<sup>60</sup>

[112]

In spite of the differences of longevity, scale, interest of scholarship, and impact in social theory, there are similarities between the Indian and the Mexican cases (and castes) that justify a parallel enquiry. In both cases, ethnicity was an important variable. Literature has demonstrated that depending on their origins and their blood, people from Mexico were registered either in the *libro de españoles* (the book of Spaniards) or in the *libro de castas* (the book of castes). This means that for ethnic reasons (or for reasons of “na-

59. For an overall view of the debates, see: Richard E. Boyer, *Caste and Identity in Colonial Mexico* (Connecticut: University of Connecticut Press, 1997); Miguel Marín Bosch, *Puebla neocolonial, 1777-1831: Casta, ocupacion y matrimonio en la segunda ciudad de Nueva España* (Puebla: Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, 1999); Robert H. Jackson, *Race, Caste, and Status: Indians in Colonial Spanish America* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1999); Christin Cleaton, *Spaniards, Caciques and Indians: Spanish Imperial Policy and the Construction of Caste in New Spain, 1521-1570* (Saarbrücken: Dr. Müller, 2008).

60. On the connections between caste and race, see, among others: Jack D. Forbes, *Black Africans and Native Americans: Color, Race, and Caste in the Evolution of Red-Black Peoples* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988); Jackson; Abby Sue Fisher, *Mestizaje and the Cuadros de Castas: Visual Representations of Race, Status, and Dress in Eighteenth Century Mexico* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1992); Ilona Katzew, *Ordering the Colony: Casta Painting and the Imaging of Race in Eighteenth-Century Mexico* (New York: New York University, 2000); Magali Marie Carrera, *Imagining Identity in New Spain: Race, Lineage, and the Colonial Body in Portraiture and Casta Painting* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003); Ilona Katzew, *Casta Painting: Images of Race in Eighteenth-Century México* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005); Frederic P. Miller, Agnes F. Vandome and John McBrewster, eds. *Casta: Spanish Colonization of the Americas, Racial Segregation, Miscegenation, Hispanic, Gente de Razón, Tornatrás, Black Ladino, Hyperdescent, Hypodescent, Hispanic American Wars of Independence* (Alphascript Publishing, 2010). Two essays in the recent book *Race and Blood in the Iberian World* addressed directly this problem too: Maria Eugenia Chaves, “Race and Caste. Other Words and Other Worlds”, 29-58 and Lewis 99-123. In contrast, this dimension has hardly been discussed for India. For the Indian case, see: Govind S. Ghurye, *Caste and Race in India* (London: Kegan Paul, 1932), and Anthony de Reuck, ed. *Caste and Race: Comparative Approaches* (London: J. and A. Churchill, 1967).



tion”) the “pure Spaniards” were not included in the Mexican caste-system; somehow a positive parallel of the exclusion of the “untouchables” from the Indian one. Both systems excluded some people, and in both for ethnic reasons. Adding to that, similarly to its Asian counterpart, depending on the marriages and the social groups involved in them (which had more or less Spanish blood), Mexican people could be ranked in different positions in a very complex and nuanced hierarchy. It was not by chance, therefore, that both in India and Mexico practices of blood origin certification (frequently “genealogical fictions”, as María Elena Martínez has called them) were crucial. They intended to verify (as in the Mexican case) the amount of Spanish blood of a certain person in order to locate him or her in the scale of “castas”, or out of it; or to ensure (as in India) the purity of blood of another one, permitting to ascribe (or expel) him or her to (or from) an upper caste (those that claimed purity of blood). In both cases, castes were tools of inclusion and exclusion, as well as forms of differentiation, organization and hierarchization of multi-ethnic and multicultural societies.<sup>61</sup>

[113]

Can the parallels identified in these two geographically and culturally distant territories be attributed to the Iberian imperial presence in both? Independently of the pre-existing local systems of ranking people, the interference of Iberian imperial rule was surely relevant for the discursive invention (and therefore, and in certain ways, social invention) of both systems. Still, this assumption does not explain why the word “casta” became so powerful. Only further research can provide data that will help us to understand these new problems.

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